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The Apothecary Diaries

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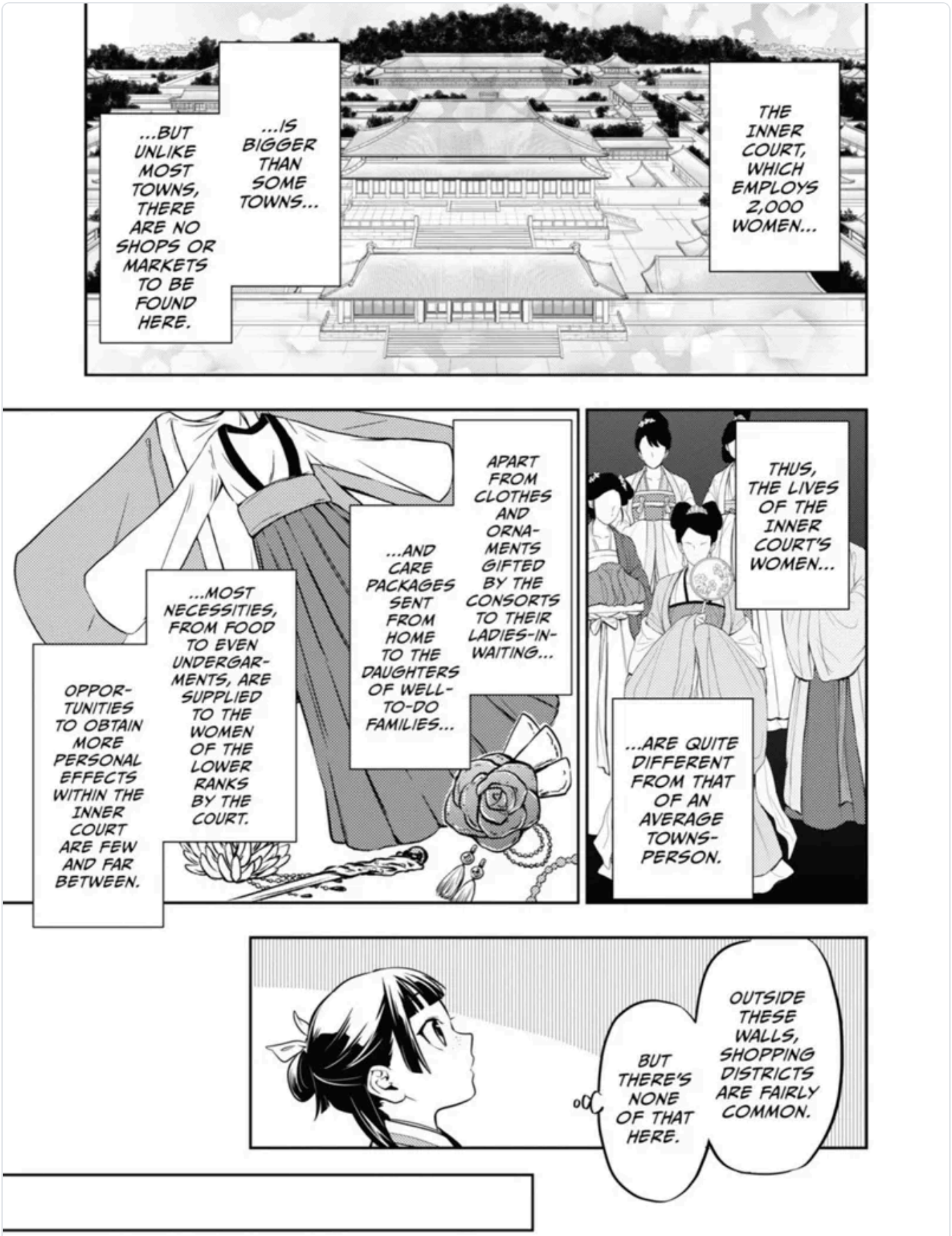
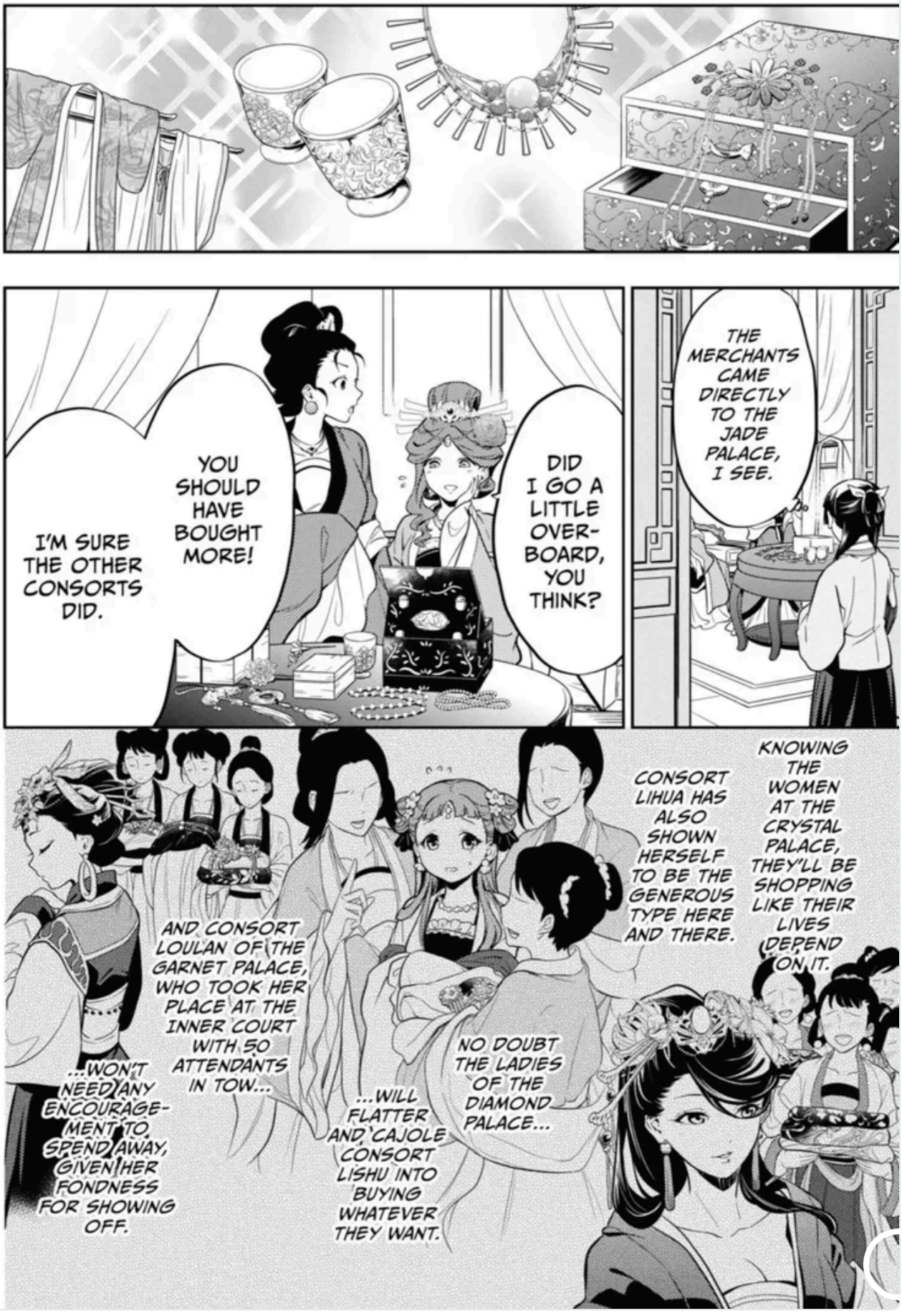
Chapter 43 The Caravan

CLOTHES BECOME UNWEARABLE THE SECOND THEY FALL OUT OF FASHION!
WE'VE CULLED QUITE A LOT.
IS IT REALLY ALL RIGHT TO GET RID OF THIS MUCH, THOUGH?
IT'S FINE!
WE'LL BE BUYING MORE WHEN THE NEXT CARAVAN COMES.
WHAT CARAVAN ...?
...BUT HERE AT THE INNER COURT, IT SEEMS TO ALSO REFER TO TRAVELING SHOPS THAT BARTER GOODS.
A CARAVAN IS USUALLY A BAND OF MERCHANTS CROSSING THE DESERT...
IT'S GOING TO BE A MUCH BIGGER CARAVAN THIS TIME, THOUGH!
OHH!
YOU JUST HAPPENED TO NOT BE HERE THE LAST TIME ONE ARRIVED.
HUH.


THE INNER COURT, WHICH EMPLOYS 2,000 WOMEN...
...IS BIGGER THAN SOME TOWNS...
...BUT UNLIKE MOST TOWNS, THERE ARE NO SHOPS OR MARKETS TO BE FOUND HERE.
APART FROM CLOTHES AND ORNA-MENTS GIFTED BY THE CONSORTS TO THEIR LADIES-IN-WAITING...
...AND CARE PACKAGES SENT FROM HOME TO THE DAUGHTERS OF WELL-TO-DO FAMILIES...
...MOST NECESSITIES, FROM FOOD TO EVEN UNDERGAR-MENTS, ARE SUPPLIED TO THE WOMEN OF THE LOWER RANKS BY THE COURT.
OPPOR-TUNITIES TO OBTAIN MORE PERSONAL EFFECTS WITHIN THE INNER COURT ARE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN.
THUS, THE LIVES OF THE INNER COURT'S WOMEN...
...ARE QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF AN AVERAGE TOWNS-PERSON.
OUTSIDE THESE WALLS, SHOPPING DISTRICTS ARE FAIRLY COMMON.
BUT THERE'S NONE OF THAT HERE.

BUZZ
BUZZ
AWWW! IT LOOKS LIKE SO MUCH FUN!
DAY ONE OF THE CARAVAN'S FIVE-DAY SOJOURN
EVEN THOUGH YOU HAVE NOWHERE TO WEAR THEM TO?
SO WHAT?! I WANT THEM ANYWAY!
OOOH!
WHAT I WOULDN'T GIVE FOR SOME NEW CLOTHES AND THINGS!
MEANWHILE, LOWLY UNDERLINGS LIKE US, WHO HAVE NO PLACE IN THAT ILLUSTRIOUS CROWD, ARE ON THE JOB WITH NOTHING TO DO.
...ARE HAVING A GREAT TIME TODAY.
THOSE WHO HOLD HIGHER RANKS AT THE INNER COURT— THAT IS, THE CONSORTS AND THE LADIES WHO SERVE THEM...

I THINK I CAN GET A LITTLE TIME OFF ON THE LAST DAY THE CARAVAN'S HERE, SO...
HEY, MAO-MAO?
ちょい TUG...
SHE'S ASKING ME TO GO WITH HER?
BEING INVITED IS A PLEASANT THING.


DID I GO A LITTLE OVER-BOARD, YOU THINK?
YOU SHOULD HAVE BOUGHT MORE!
I'M SURE THE OTHER CONSORTS DID.
THE MERCHANTS CAME DIRECTLY TO THE JADE PALACE, I SEE.
KNOWING THE WOMEN AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE, THEY'LL BE SHOPPING LIKE THEIR LIVES DEPEND ON IT.
CONSORT LIHUA HAS ALSO SHOWN HERSELF TO BE THE GENEROUS TYPE HERE AND THERE.
NO DOUBT THE LADIES OF THE DIAMOND PALACE...
...WILL FLATTER AND CAJOLE CONSORT LISHU INTO BUYING WHATEVER THEY WANT.
AND CONSORT LOULAN OF THE GARNET PALACE, WHO TOOK HER PLACE AT THE INNER COURT WITH 50 ATTENDANTS IN TOW...
...WON'T NEED ANY ENCOURAGE-MENT TO SPEND AWAY, GIVEN HER FONDNESS FOR SHOWING OFF.

BUT FROM WHAT I HEAR, IT'S COMMON FOR THE EMPEROR'S FAVORITE TO SPEND MUCH MORE EXTRAVAGANTLY.
TO THE WOMEN WHO ARE MONETARILY COMPENSATED FOR THEIR WORK AS THE EMPEROR'S CONSORTS, CLOTHING AND FURNISHINGS ARE NECESSARY EXPENDITURES.
MAOMAO, HAVE YOU TAKEN A TURN AROUND THE CARAVAN YET?
IT SEEMS THE CARAVAN THIS TIME CAME VIA THE DESERT AND PASSED THROUGH CONSORT GYOKUYO'S HOMELAND.
NO.
I'LL GO ON THE LAST DAY.
SO THE JADE PALACE'S LADIES-IN-WAITING HAVE BEEN ADMIRING THE HANDICRAFTS FOR SALE MOST FONDLY.
...THE NATIONAL TREASURY COVERS THE COSTS FOR THEM ALL.
OF COURSE, NO MATTER WHICH OF THE THREE RANKS THESE 100 OR SO WOMEN OCCUPY...
NOW, NOW.
THEY'LL BE COMING AGAIN TOMORROW, SO LET'S GET TODAY'S HAUL PUT AWAY.
YES, MA'AM!
...BUT PERHAPS I CAN LOOK FORWARD TO TEA LEAVES AND SPICES.
I DOUBT THEY'LL HAVE ANYTHING IN THE WAY OF MEDICINE...

THEY'VE CERTAINLY BOUGHT A LOT OF SLEEVED ROBES AND SKIRTS THAT TIE RIGHT BELOW THE CHEST.
...HM?
THEY SAID IT'S WHAT'S IN STYLE RIGHT NOW.
THIS WAS ALL THEY HAD.
...DID THEY NOT CARRY ANY OTHER FASHIONS?
BUT THESE NEW OUTFITS ARE CLEARLY NOT TO THE CONSORT'S TASTES.
AT ANY OTHER TIME, SHE AND HER LADIES WOULD'VE CHOSEN MUCH DIFFERENT DESIGNS.
IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG WITH THEM?
CONSORT GYOKUYO IS NEARLY AT THE STAGE WHERE CLOTHING THAT REQUIRES TYING A SASH AROUND HER BELLY WILL START TO FEEL UNCOMFORT-ABLE.
...WITH HER PREGNANCY IN MIND.
I'M SURE HER LADIES-IN-WAITING MADE THEIR PURCHASES...

IF THE MERCHANTS KNEW AS MUCH...
...AND INTENTIONALLY CHOSE TO BRING THIS SELECTION OF CLOTHES...
I MAY SIMPLY BE OVER-THINKING THIS...
...BUT I CAN'T HELP WONDERING IF THEY WERE TRYING TO FIND SOMETHING OUT.
MY LADY.
I THINK IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA ON THE MORROW FOR YOU TO ASK...
...IF THEY HAVE ANY OUTFITS THAT TIE AROUND THE WAIST.

RUB
RUB
YES, I THINK I SHALL.
THE LAST DAY OF THE CARAVAN'S FIVE-DAY SOJOURN
OOOH! WOOOW !!
I GOT A BIT OF SPENDING MONEY FROM CONSORT GYOKUYO.
WAPPY
ホク
WAPPY
ホク

LOW-RANKING WOMEN OF THE COURT DON'T HAVE MUCH TO SPEND.
AND WHATEVER GOODS REMAIN AT THE STALLS TODAY HAVE BEEN PICKED OVER.
BUT THE SIGHT OF THEM IS ENOUGH TO MAKE HER EYES SPARKLE.
THIS CAREFREE XIAOLAN GLADDENS ME.
I'LL TAKE THIS, PLEASE.
OOOH!
TIE
むぎゅっ
GLOMP
GLOW
はぁ
I IMAGINE THIS IS WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO HAVE A LITTLE SISTER OR SOMETHING OF THE SORT.
IT'S PER-FECT!
KNEW IT.

YOU AREN'T GOING TO BUY HAIR TIES FOR YOURSELF?
NO, I DON'T NEED THEM.
I WOULDN'T DREAM OF FLAUNTING MY SPENDING MONEY IN FRONT OF XIAOLAN LIKE THAT.
AND ABOVE ALL, I DON'T CARE FOR THEM.
BESIDES, I'M IN THE MARKET FOR TEA AND SPICES, NOT ACCESSORIES.
I'D PROMISED XIAOLAN TO JOIN HER TODAY, OF COURSE...
...BUT I HAD ANOTHER REASON FOR WAITING UNTIL THE LAST DAY...
DIS-COUNTS.
THIS IS THE INNER COURT, FULL OF WOMEN WHO ARE IGNORANT IN THE WAYS OF THE WORLD.
I VERY MUCH DOUBT THE GOODS FOR SALE HERE ARE PRICED FAIRLY.
BUT IF THEY THINK THEY CAN RIP ME OFF THAT EASILY, THEY'VE GOT ANOTHER THING COMING!
?

10 POINT
I'LL TAKE THESE!

OH, HI THERE!
HOW'S THE KITTEN DOING?

...OHH, THE MAID WHO CAUGHT IT FOR ME.
SHE'S WELL. SHE MAKES HER HOME AT THE PHYSICIAN'S NOW.
OH!
DID YOU GET TIME OFF TODAY TOO, SHISUI?
YEAH!
I SEE YOU DECIDED TO COME AS WELL, XIAOLAN!
SO HER NAME IS SHISUI.
THEY MUST KNOW EACH OTHER SINCE THEY'RE BOTH MAIDS FOR THE LAUNDRY AND WARDROBE SERVICES.
WE'RE PROBABLY GOING TO BLOCK THE WAY HERE, SO WHY DON'T WE TALK SOMEWHERE ELSE?
PLEASE WRAP THESE THREE UP FOR ME, IF YOU WOULD.
PHYSICIAN

WHOOOA!
WHAT A LOVELY SMELL!
IS THIS THE TEA YOU JUST BOUGHT, MAOMAO?!
MM-HMM.
IT'S A BLOOMING TEA MADE WITH A FLOWER CALLED JASMINE.
WHEN YOU PLACE IT IN A WARMED VESSEL AND THEN SLOWLY POUR LUKEWARM WATER OVER IT...
...IT BLOSSOMS LIKE THIS.
IT'S NOT THE KIND OF THING I GET THE CHANCE TO BREW VERY OFTEN.
OH!
MEOOOW!
CUUUTE!
THE KITTY FROM BEFORE!
WHAT DID YOU NAME HER?
...SHE GOES BY "ADMONISHER OF THIEVES."
HUH?! WHAT A WEIRD NAME.

GOOD-NESS ME!
I HAD NO IDEA THAT LITTLE MISS MAO HAD FRIENDS!
OOH, MOON-CAKES!
I BROUGHT THEM OUT SPECIAL JUST FOR TODAY!
THANK YOOOU!
THE QUACK WAS ESPECIALLY WARY OF THE NEW FACES TO START WITH...
...SINCE MANY LADIES OF THE COURT LOOK DOWN ON HIM JUST FOR BEING A EUNUCH.
BUT ONCE HE REALIZED THEY WOULD TREAT HIM WITHOUT PREJUDICE, HE WARMED TO THE TASK OF BEING A GRACIOUS HOST.
THIS ISN'T THE KIND OF PLACE TO WHICH YOU'D NORMALLY INVITE PEOPLE OVER FOR TEA AND A CHAT...
...BUT SINCE WE'RE ALL HAVING A GOOD TIME, TODAY IS AN EXCEPTION.
HE HAS HIS MOMENTS, THIS GUY.

SO IT'S SHISUI'S FIRST TIME EXPERI-ENCING THE CARAVAN TOO.
ASSUMING SHE CAME TO THE PALACE AROUND WHEN CONSORT LOULAN JOINED THE INNER COURT...
...SHE'S BEEN HERE ABOUT HALF A YEAR.
HEY, IS IT ALWAYS LIKE A FESTIVAL WHEN THE CARAVAN COMES?
HEH! HEH! HEH!
I WONDER WHY.
HMMM, IT FEELS LIKE THEY STAYED A LOT LONGER THAN USUAL.
ARE YOU SURE YOU OUGHT TO BE TELLING US THAT?
OOH! SO SOME FANCY BIG SHOT'S COMING HERE?!
WHISPER
I HEAR IT'S BECAUSE AN EMISSARY FROM A FOREIGN LAND WILL BE ARRIVING SOON.

.....
BY THE WAY...
...THERE'S A STRANGE ODOR COMING FROM THE NORTH SIDE LATELY. YOU WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT, WOULD YOU?
PHEW!
I'M GLAD SHE CHANGED THE SUBJECT.
A STRANGE ODOR, HMM? THAT PART OF THE GROUNDS IS RATHER NEGLECTED AND HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO GROW WILD...
...SO PERHAPS A WATERWAY'S GOTTEN CLOGGED?
THE WATER-WORKS OF THE INNER COURT UTILIZE WESTERN TECHNOL-OGY.
THE WASTE FLOWS THROUGH UNDERGROUND CHANNELS AND OUT INTO THE GREAT RIVER INSTEAD OF BEING DUMPED INTO THE MOAT, AS I UNDERSTAND IT.
THIS IS HOW THEY PREVENT THE SPREAD OF DISEASE IN SUCH A LARGE FAMILY.

SHISUI, DOES YOUR WORK TAKE YOU TO THE NORTH SIDE?
HEH HEH HEH! THE GRASSES GROW WILD AND THICK THERE!
BUT IF ONE OF THOSE OUTGOING CHANNELS BECAME CLOGGED...
...THEN IT'S POSSIBLE FOR THE SMELL TO REACH THE SURFACE.
CRINKLE
AND THAT MEANS INSECTS GALORE! SO I'VE GOTTEN TO DRAW A WHOLE BUNCH! IT'S THE BEST!

THEY LOOK LIKE SCIENTIFIC DIAGRAMS.
WOW, THESE ARE REALLY GOOD.
SPIDERS!
THE EGG CASES OF PRAYING MANTISES ARE EXCELLENT FOR APHRODISIACS, WHILE EARTH-WORMS ARE EFFECTIVE IN REDUCING FEVERS.
INSECTS AND THEIR BYPRODUCTS CAN BE USED IN MEDICINES AS INGREDIENTS, AND MANY ARE EXTREMELY POTENT.
...FOR FINDING ANY NUMBER OF HUUUUGE SPIDERS!
AND WHILE YOU WON'T FIND THEM IN THE SOUTHERN ORCHARDS, WHICH ARE KEPT UP...
...THE RUINS TO THE NORTH ARE A PRIME SPOT...

TWITCH うずッ
TWITCH うずッ
OH?
...BUT THEIR SILK IS SAID TO BE AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO STOP BLEEDING.
SPIDERS ARE HARD TO COLLECT, SO I HAVE YET TO TRY IT OUT FOR MYSELF...
OH, YES, PLEASE! I'D LOVE TO!
WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN ME AND SEE THEM FOR YOUR-SELF?!
FWUMP
KINDRED SPIRITS

WITH THEIR FIVE-DAY SOJOURN AT ITS END, THE CARAVAN DEPARTED.
REEK
あ
も
HEY, HOW DO YOU WRITE "STINK"?
YOU SAID IT.
IT STINKS.
JASMINE
MARJORAM

THE OILS IMPORTED FROM THE WEST ARE PARTICULARLY STRONG.
THE SMELLS ARE FINE ON THEIR OWN, BUT WITH SO MANY MIXED TOGETHER, IT REALLY REEKS.
GLANCE
チラ

GUESS NAIL COLORING IS A THING OF THE PAST, AND EVERYONE'S FOUND A NEW FAD TO GO CRAZY OVER.
SINCE THE CARAVAN WENT ON ITS WAY, THE INNER COURT HAS BEEN AWASH IN PERFUME OIL.
WITH ALL THE GARMENTS SLATHERED IN VARIOUS FRAGRANCES COMING HERE TO BE CLEANED, THE LAUNDRY STINKS TO HIGH HEAVEN.

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MAOMAO
JASMINE
XIAOLAN
THE POPULARITY OF THAT NOVEL IS STILL GOING STRONG...
...SO XIAOLAN'S STUDIES CONTINUE.
AND HERE I WAS SURE SHE WOULDN'T STICK WITH IT.
I'M TERRIBLY IMPRES-SED.
WHOOPS!
TRIP
29

BOOMF
ARE YOU OKAY?
OH GOSH, I'M SO SORRY!
...ROSE, HUH?
I BET IF I WERE TO SELL IT NOW, I COULD MAKE A KILLING ON THE PERFUME OIL I EXTRACTED BEFORE...
...BUT CONCENTRATED ROSE OIL CAN HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON PREGNANT WOMEN, SO...
ふわ〜ん
REEEEK

ZWIP
ばっ
EEEEEK...
I MUST GO!
すん SNUFFLE
SNUFFLE
くん SNIFF
SNIFF
FWUMP
EEEEEEEK!
TO THE CRYSTAL PALACE!
TO THE MOST EASILY INFLUENCED, FASHIONABLE PLACE HERE, THE ONE QUICKEST TO JUMP ON ALL THE LATEST TRENDS!

MY APOLO-GIES, SIR. I COULDN'T HELP IT. I JUST LOST MY HEAD.
I TRULY THOUGHT YOU WERE A WOMAN WITH A BIT MORE RESTRAINT THAN THAT.

SNIFF SNIFF
SNIFFLE SNIFFLE
IF ONE GOES AROUND INDISCRIMINATELY SNIFFING THE LADIES OF THE CRYSTAL PALACE WITHOUT THEIR CONSENT...
...ONE CAN BE SURE THEIR LETTERS OF PROTEST WILL BE QUICK TO REACH ONE'S SUPERIORS.

I DON'T WANT A GENUINE PERVERT CALLING ME THAT.
ARE YOU SOME KIND OF DERANGED PERVERT?!
WHY SMELL THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE?!
I SHALL OBTAIN CONSENT PRIOR TO SMELLING ANYONE NEXT TIME.
FWAP
I'M GLAD IT BROUGHT JINSHI RUNNING.
MY COURSE OF ACTION WAS NECESSARY TO DISPEL ANY DOUBTS I HAD LEFT.
I DID WHAT I DID FOR GOOD REASON.

WHAT'S THIS?
ROSE
PHOENIX TREE
FRANKINCENSE
CASSIA
BENZOIN

WHY MAKE A LIST OF THEM?
THESE ARE THE PERFUMES AND OILS THE LADIES OF THE INNER COURT HAVE BEEN WEARING.
THAT'S RIGHT.
THEY'RE ALL FRA-GRANCES.

WHILE THEY AREN'T BEING USED IN SIGNIFICANT QUANTITIES...
...THESE SCENTS CAN ALL DO HARM TO WOMEN WHO ARE WITH CHILD.

IT'S ALL RIGHT. DO GO ON.
NOD コク
PEEK チラッ
IN ADDITION TO PERFUME OILS, THE CARAVAN WAS ALSO SELLING SPICES AND TEAS.
JASMINE CAN CAUSE THE THE WOMB TO CONTRACT...
...SO IT'S THOUGHT TO BE BEST AVOIDED WHEN PREGNANT.
I BOUGHT THESE FROM THERE MYSELF.
HOT PEPPERS ARE A COMMON INGREDIENT IN THE POTIONS PROSTITUTES DRINK TO ABORT UNWANTED PREGNANCIES.

ARE YOU SAYING THE USE OF THESE INCREASES THE LIKELIHOOD OF A MISCARRIAGE?
NONE OF THEM ARE CERTAIN TO WORK.
USED IN AVERAGE, EVERYDAY QUANTITIES, THEY'RE HARMLESS.
AND THAT'S PROBABLY WHY THEY WERE BROUGHT INTO THE PALACE.
I SHOULD'VE REALIZED WHEN I MADE MY PURCHASES.
CLUTCH
PERHAPS I ALLOWED MYSELF TO GET TOO WRAPPED UP IN THE FESTIVE ATMOSPHERE.
CAN YOU LOOK INTO THE MERCHANTS WHO CAME AND WENT WITH THE CARAVAN?
OF COURSE...
...BUT I VERY MUCH DOUBT THEY THEMSELVES KEEP EXHAUSTIVE RECORDS OF THEIR WARES.
WE INSPECTED EVERYTHING THAT WAS BROUGHT IN, YOU KNOW.

THAT ALONE WOULD HAVE SUFFICED FROM THE INSPECTORS' STANDPOINT.
THE GOODS PRESENTED MUST HAVE BEEN UP TO SNUFF FOR THE INNER COURT.
BUT BEHIND A NUMBER OF THE ITEMS...
...LURKS AN UNKNOWN SIDE EFFECT.
DOES THIS NOT REMIND YOU OF THE INCIDENT WITH THE TOXIC FACE POWDER?

SO YOU'RE TELLING ME SOMEONE OUT THERE IS PLOTTING TO BRING POISONS INTO THE INNER COURT?
...I...
...ONLY KNOW THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT CAN BE USED AS POISONS...
...BUT NOT ALL OF THEM ARE TREATED AS SUCH.
BECAUSE OF IT, PRINCESS LINGLI FELL GRAVELY ILL, WHILE THE CROWN PRINCE, CONSORT LIHUA'S SON, LOST HIS LIFE.
ALL FACE POWDERS MADE WITH LEAD HAVE SINCE BEEN BANNED AT THE INNER COURT.
BUT TO LOOK AT IT IN A DIF-FERENT WAY...
PERHAPS A MERCHANT WAS EMBOLDENED TO THINK THEY COULD BRING IN ANYTHING OTHER THAN FACE POWDER.

I SIMPLY BELIEVE IT WOULD BE WISE TO WARN THE OTHER CONSORTS AS WELL.
HOWEVER, I CAN'T GO AHEAD AND DECLARE THERE TO BE A MASTERMIND AT WORK HERE EITHER.
ALL I HAVE TO GO ON RIGHT NOW ARE MY ASSUMPTIONS.
THERE WAS ALSO THE ISSUE WITH THE CLOTHING THEY HAD FOR SALE.
PERHAPS THEY WERE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT...
...IF ANYONE AT THE INNER COURT IS WITH CHILD.

ALL THESE SEEMING COINCI-DENCES ALIGNING TO MAKE SOMETHING DELIBERATE OCCUR...
IT JUST REMINDS ME OF THAT FATEFUL DAY.
YOU MUSTN'T SPECULATE ALOUD.
SUIREI, THE LADY OFFICIAL WHO CAME BACK TO LIFE, HAS YET TO BE FOUND.
HOW MUCH IS TRULY SPECULATION, AND HOW MUCH IS CERTAINTY?
AND MANY MYSTERIES INVOLVING HER STILL REMAIN.
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THIS MAY HAVE BEEN THE ONLY TIME THEY EVER HAD THIS PARTICULAR ASSORTMENT OF GOODS.
IF THE PERFUME OILS HADN'T CAUGHT ON AT THE INNER COURT, I MIGHT NOT EVEN HAVE NOTICED THEM.
...I WOULD HAVE HAD NO INTEREST IN THE CARAVAN FOR LACK OF MONEY.
HAD I NOT BEEN A CONSORT'S MAID...
I CAN'T TELL THE INTENTIONAL APART FROM THE COINCIDENTAL.
EVEN IF IT LOOKS LIKE I'M RUNNING AWAY...
...I CAN'T STAND THE THOUGHT OF PUNISHMENT BEING DOLED OUT ON SOMEONE...
...BASED ON SOMETHING I SAID WITHOUT ANY PROOF.

...I'M BONE TIRED AND NOT FEELING WELL AT ALL.
THIS IS THE JASMINE TEA SHISUI GAVE BACK TO ME.
I'VE ALREADY HAD MY FILL OF IT!
THIS SURE TAKES ME BACK.
IN THE OLD DAYS, MY SISTERS AT VERDIGRIS WOULD ALLOW ME TO DRINK THIS WITH THEM WHEN THEY HAD NO PATRONS.

.....
I THOUGHT YOU SAID THAT TEA WAS POISON.
POISONS IN SMALL QUANTI-TIES CAN ALSO HAVE MEDICINAL USES.
HMPH!
MUST YOU BE SO NITPICKY ABOUT EVERY-THING?
ALSO, WE'RE IN THE KITCHENS.
BESIDES, A CUP OF THE STUFF ISN'T GOING TO DO MUCH TO ME.
I DARESAY THIS IS HARDLY THE PLACE FOR SOMEONE OF YOUR STANDING, SIR JINSHI.
I'M NOT PREGNANT EITHER.
43

THIS IS ALL I'VE GOT LEFT.
I COULD BREW ANOTHER CUP, BUT IT WOULD BE WEAK.
MAKE ME A CUP OF THAT TOO.
DELIV-ERING A MESSAGE.
WHERE IS SIR GAO SHUN?
OH WELL.
I'LL MAKE HIM SOME WHITE TEA INSTEAD.
YEAH, RIGHT.
THAT'S FINE.

WHAT KIND OF EFFECTS DOES THIS TEA HAVE?
IT'S GOOD FOR RELAXING THE MIND.
IT CAN HELP WITH BOTH INSOMNIA AND WAKING UP IN THE MORNING.
IT CAN HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT DURING PREG-NANCY...
...BUT WHEN IT'S TIME TO GIVE BIRTH, I HEAR IT CAN BE USED TO PROMOTE LABOR.
SOUNDS LIKE IT DOES MORE GOOD THAN BAD.
YES.
THAT'S WHY IT'S SO EASY TO OVERLOOK THE HARMFUL SIDE EFFECTS.

HERE YOU ARE. WHITE TEA.
I TOLD YOU THE WEAK TEA WAS FINE.
LOOK AT HIM, SULKING LIKE A CHILD.
JASMINE TEA ALSO HAS ANOTHER KIND OF EFFECT.
OH? DO TELL.
FOR MEN IN PARTICULAR, IMPOTENCE.

.....
MAYBE THE IRONY HITS TOO HARD FOR HIM.
YIKES!
OH.
SSSP
...I WONDER IF WE HAVE ANY SNACKS...
SIP

47

THUMP
NOT TO MY TASTE.
GOOD-BYE.

.....

...NOW YOU'VE DONE IT...